and industrial backwardness in the State of Sikkim, Government of Sikkim has informed that for the time being they are not considering enforcement of the Trade Union Act, 1926.

Interest rate on EPF

1953. SHRI VIJAY J. DARDA: Will the Minister of LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware that with the retention of 9.5 per cent interest four crore EPF subscribers are happy, and their 37.17 lakh counterparts whose deposits are managed by 2,491 private players are in a state of shock; and

(b) if so, whether Government are also thinking of bringing their interest rate at par with that of EPF subscribers so that avowed aim of Government to ensure equality of benefit to similarly placed employees is not denied to them?

THE MINISTER OF LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT (SHRI K. CHANDRA SEKHAR RAO): (a) and (b) The benefit of interest rate of 9.5 per cent is available to the members of the Employees' Provident Funds as well as employees of the exempted establishments.

As per terms and conditions for grant of exemption under section 17 of the Employees' Provident Funds & Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952, the rate of interest declared by the Board of Trustees of the exempted establishment shall not be lower than the rate of interest declared by the Central Government. In the event of any deficiency in the interest declared by the Board of Trustees, the same is to be made good by the employer to bring it upto the statutory limit.

Fixation of interest rate on EPF

1954. SHRI RAJKUMAR DHOOT: Will the Minister of LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that uncertainty over fixation of rate of interest on EPF is hanging for long time;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor;

(c) whether the rate of interest is decided every year; and

(d) the reasons for not taking a policy decision on a long term basis?

THE MINISTER OF LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT (SHRI K. CHANDRA SEKHAR RAO): (a) No, Sir. The Central Government has ratified the interest @ 9.5% for the year 2004-05 to be credited to the accounts of the members of the Employees' Provident Fund.

(b) Does not arise in view of (a) above.

(c) Yes, Sir.

(d) As per the provisions of the Employees' Provident Funds and Miscellaneous Provision Act, 1952, rate of interest is decided on an annual basis depending on the earning of the interest on the amount invested according to the Pattern of Investment as approved by the Ministry of Finance.

Assistance to plantation workers in Tamil Nadu

1955. SHRI S.P.M. SYED KHAN: Will the Minister of LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT be pleased to state:

(a) whether any scheme is being implemented by Government for the welfare of tea/cardamom plantation workers;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the details of Government's assistance extended to tea/cardamom plantation workers particulary in Tamil Nadu during the last three years?

THE MINISTER OF LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT (SHRI K. CHANDRA SEKHAR RAO): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) Tea Board has welfare schemes for the benefit of tea plantation workers. The schemes are supplemental in nature as the tea garden management has the primary responsibility of looking after the welfare of workers. Tea Board provides financial assistance for construction of school buildings/colleges, hospitals/clinics and capital grant towards purchase of medical equipments, ambulance etc.

Spices Board is awarding educational stipend to the children of the cardamom estate workers and is also extending grant-in-aid to educational